



News Release

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Make Summer Reunions a Time to Talk About Family Health History

Knowing Your Past Protects Your Future

(Salt Lake City, UT) – As families plan their summer reunions, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) urges all Utahns to make time to talk about their family health history. To help families talk about their health history, the UDOH is offering a free toolkit.

“Summer reunions are a great time to get your entire family involved in learning about your family health history,” said Jenny Johnson, Health Program Specialist with the UDOH Chronic Disease Genomics Program. “Many families already share their genealogy during their reunions so talking about family health history is easy. And it helps you know how your past affects your future health.”

Magna resident and professional genealogist Starr Hailey Campbell understands the importance of knowing not only her genealogy but her family health history too after surviving breast cancer twice. “Having recurrent breast cancer felt like a death sentence. But because I knew my family health history and that four generations of my family had died of cancer, I was able to get screened sooner. Now my family talks about our family’s health history and uses this knowledge to make better decisions about screening.”

The new toolkit includes fun ideas, conversation starters, and other resources to help families take the steps to collect a family health history. These include:

- Talking about their family health history during family gatherings.
- Writing down what they learn about their family health history.
- Sharing their family health history with their health care provider and other family members who can benefit from knowing this information.

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“Not only can this information be life-saving for some families, but learning about your family health history may be easier than you think,” said Johnson.

For families who may feel uncomfortable talking about their family health history, the toolkit provides tips on how to find health information in documents many families already have.

“Most of us probably have some of our family health history in our genealogy records and we don’t even know it,” said Campbell. “Using what you already have can help you start a conversation with your family.”

Chronic health problems like heart disease, stroke, asthma, cancer and diabetes tend to run in families. When close family members have the same health problem or develop a problem at a younger age than expected, this can increase other family members’ risk of developing the problem. But the good news is, by learning about your family health history you can make healthy choices to lower your risk.

Sharing your family health history with your health care provider is important. Your health care provider can help you understand your risk for developing a health problem and make recommendations about lifestyle choices and screening tests to lower your risk.

To get a free Family Health History Toolkit visit www.health.utah.gov/genomics or call the Health Resource Line at 1-888-222-2542.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.